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Necessary monsters: claimed 'crypto-creatures' regarded as *genii locii*

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ABSTRACT
Anomalous phenomena, actual or otherwise, can be perceived as regional or even national symbols. This preliminary paper takes a look at the various ways whereby such phenomena manage to become expressions of a communal identity, such as by erecting monuments, building museums, or even issuing stamps, and how they come into existence, survive, and remain viable as a local expression. Regarded in this way, these disputed phenomena are virtually modern day versions of *genii locii* – protective spirits of places or regions.

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Introduction

One of the most localized of the spiritual concepts of ancient Rome was that of the *genius loci*, the protective spirit of a place. This genius loci was regarded as the *Summe der Persönlichkeit*, an embodiment of the collective psyche of a place.

> It was often depicted in religious iconography as a figure holding attributes such as a cornucopia, patera (libation bowl) or snake. Many Roman altars found throughout the Western Roman Empire were dedicated to a particular genius loci. (Der Kleine Pauly 1975, vol. 2, col. 741)

In only a half-jocular vein, one could claim that this happens still – although the altars are rather effigies for tourist's delight, when, for example, the people of Kelowna, on Lake Okanagan, erect a statue of their local lake monster, the Ogopogo, 'the sacred creature of the Okanagan Waters' (Gaal 2001). In a serious moment, researcher Andy Roberts once asked himself if unexplained or 'Fortean'[1] phenomena like the Big Grey Man of Ben McDhui, Scotland, a sort of phantom Yeti, could be compared to the concept of the *genius loci* or *genii loci* (Roberts 1998, 168).

In other words, a sense of identity and place, and even belonging, may be formulated by things that, to the average person, appear silly and even degrading – or weirdly not of this world.

Even today, as Charles Fort, that great chronicler of anomalous phenomena, points out in his autobiography, some landscapes contain the necessity of a creature or phenomenon, and because these fit that landscape or the desires

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and/or fears of their inhabitants, they are not only 'necessary monsters', but can also be regarded as an expression of the genius loci (Fort 1994, 12).

To use a just a few examples, the legend of the Heinzelmännchen (dwarf-like helpful house spirits) is so famous in Cologne that a sculptured fountain is dedicated to them; the Riesengebirge is known for Rübezahl, a benign giant. Both can be found depicted on postcards, key pendants, even ash trays. Or, again, in the USA, there are several towns which claim to be 'Bigfoot's Home'.

It seems that a place, town, or even whole region can identify with a 'paranormal phenomenon', and derive some sense of belonging and community from it, even if the claim is sometimes only made as a joke or a half-belief, and to encourage tourism.

Quite independent of the question as to whether localized 'forteana' such as bigfoot, lake monsters or other 'crypto-creatures' actually exist in common physical reality, this short paper aims at exploring, albeit in a preliminary fashion, some aspects of this fascinating field.

The Loch Ness monster: from denial to acceptance

It can take some time before anybody identifies with something so outrageously 'silly' as a monster in the local lake. At Loch Ness, it took several months in the second half of 1933 before the monster was accepted as part of the landscape, although it was regarded as a foreign intrusion, in this case, an animal that had come in from the sea (Bauer 1986, 36).

On 12 May 1933, after the first sighting reports appeared in local newspapers, the *Inverness Courier* published a letter by Captain John Macdonald, who, for 50 years, had supervised all regular and tourist steamers on the loch. Macdonald wrote:

> It is news for me to learn, as your correspondent states, that 'for generations the Loch has been credited with being the home of a fearsome monster.' I have sailed in Loch Ness for fifty years, and during that time I have made no fewer than 20,000 trips up and down Loch Ness. During that half century of almost daily intercourse with Loch Ness I have never seen such a 'monster' as described by your correspondent.

But numbers of reported sightings of a monster increased. Mainly English authors considered Scottish folklore as an indication of a long history of monster episodes.

It was writer Constance Whyte who created the legend of a Nessie tradition in 1957 in her book *More Than A Legend* (Whyte 1957) – even though the review in the *Inverness Courier* (12 April 1957, p. 3), which praised the book, said it contained only one mistake, and that was to claim a monster tradition. The monster had been news in 1933, but it was also new (Magin 2011, 205ff.). Whyte's claim of a tradition was so often reprinted as fact in Nessie books

(which, in the main, had English and American authors) that Scottish people looking up their own past now accept this fake history as real.

In 1988, I met a policeman from Orkney who said he had seen Nessie in 1977. He was sitting in Inverness Library preparing a paper on the Loch Ness monster for a talk. He was leafing through Chicago biologist Roy P. Mackal's (1976) book on Nessie as part of his research into the tradition of the monster. A landscape tradition that is deeply acknowledged, whether or not believed in, can thus be both quite recent and second-hand.

Today, whether locals believe in the monster or not, there is a total identification of the whole region with it (and its myth), and this by far exceeds the banks of the loch proper. Outside of Scotland, the Loch Ness monster stands for Scotland as a whole.

According to the *Daily Mirror* (13 September 2014), the Loch Ness Monster campaigned against independence of Scotland. The 'mythical beast' rose from the loch to spell out its views

> on whether or not Scotland should dump the union and go it alone … Amazing photos have emerged that appear to show the Loch Ness Monster rising from the famous Scottish waters and spelling out a message on whether or not the nation should go it alone. And the monster's verdict? 'Loch Aye the NO!'

The Loch Ness monster, at first rejected by locals, has now become the symbol not only for the region, but, to some extent, for the whole country.

Ogopogo: from fearful beast to ecological awareness

The 'history' of Ogopogo, the alleged monster of Lake Okanagan in British Columbia, Canada, conventionally begins with the story of the Indian chief Timbasket, who ignores warnings that the lake houses a dangerous creature which must be pacified by sacrificing a small animal. 'As he paddled his canoe close to shore; waves suddenly appeared; and in a flurry of lashing water; the chief and his family disappeared' (Gaal 2001, 12). Writing with a measure of hyperbole, monster chronicler Arlene Gaal says about the arrival of white settlers in the 1870s, 'Concerns arose and many settlers took turns patrolling the lakeshore, musket in hand, to protect their families from an impending Ogopogo attack'. Also, she adds, in 1860, 'John MacDougal swims his team of horses across Okanagan Lake behind his canoe. They are pulled under by a mysterious force and are never seen again' (Gaal 2001, 185).

Although these are twenty-first-century projections into the past, they generally indicate that, in the belief of First Nation Americans as well as the first European and American settlers, the lake was the home of some horrible force to be reckoned with. From this it is clear that, in the beginning, the later monster was certainly a representation of the harmful aspects of this large body of water – a rather malevolent *genius loci*.

That Ogopogo was perceived as a dangerous elemental protecting the lake is acknowledged in all books on the monster, as well as in a plaque erected at Squally Point, the site of the drowning of the Amerindian chief, by the Department of Recreation and Conservation. Meurger and Gagnon (1988, 172–173) call this official text 'a little masterpiece of naïve Rousseauism with racialistic undertones':

> Ogopogo's Home. Before the unimaginative, practical whiteman came, the fearsome lake monster, N'ha-a-itk, was well known to the primitive, superstitious Indians. His home was believed to be a cave at Squally Point, and small animals were carried in the canoes to appease the serpent. Ogopogo is still seen each year – but now by the white man!

In order to remain a symbol of a locale, Ogopogo had to adapt to different perceptions of landscape over time. The titles of the different editions of Arlene Gaal's book on the Ogopogo, for example, clearly show a progression from the descriptive to the interpretative, from the neutral to the adoption of the 'monster' as an almost holy symbol: 'Beneath the Depth' (1976, neutral), 'Ogopogo: The True Story of The Okanagan Lake Million Dollar Monster' (1986, commercialism and tourism), and finally, 'In Search of Ogopogo: Sacred Creature of the Okanagan Waters' (2001, ecological awareness). In this latest title, Ogopogo once again is a sacred symbol, not simply a living creature like any other.

In contrast to the fierce beast that started the legend, the modern writer Gaal now states about Ogopogo:

> There is … some solace in the knowledge that the animals have never presented a real threat and appear to be both docile in nature and cognitive of territorial rights as they manoeuver in and around the many swimmers and boaters of Okanagan Lake. (Gaal 2001, 10)

In addition to the Squally Point plaque, which bears the legend 'Ogopogo's Home', the local identification with the monster is evidenced by a colourful full-size statue in Kelowna that has large and sharp teeth, but, far from being fearsome, looks rather friendly. It resembles a comic book dragon more than any convincing zoological model (Meurger and Gagnon 1988, 173; Radford and Nickell: 206, 132) – see Figure 1. Even more colourful, with a bright yellow crest, is 'Ogi Ogopogo', a mascot of the University of British Columbia sports team (Shopa 2013).

Champ – symbol of the environment

Champ is the name given to an alleged monster that is said to dwell in Lake Champlain, which is situated mainly in the eastern USA, but stretches across the border into Canada.

Claims and stories that Indians already knew Champ are shown by Robert Bartholomew (2012, 8–9) to be inventions or misinterpretations, as is the first

Figure 1. A somewhat jocular or 'Disneyfied' representation of the lake monster, Ogopogo (© Hamedog, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=16712537).

sighting of the 'creature' in 1609 by the explorer Samuel de Champlain (Meurger and Gagnon 1988, 268–270), but these are needed to create historical depth for the modern legend and help to tie the lake to the monster far more closely and for a much longer time than is actually the case. In fact the first reports seem to have been firmly tongue in cheek (Bartholomew 2012, 13ff). Today, Lake Champlain is well known as 'America's Loch Ness'; Champ the monster serves as a symbol of both the lake and various aspects of it.

As an example, the city of Port Henry on the banks of the lake has a large board listing all sightings of Champ that were made in the region, therefore asserting a kind of priority on sightings compared to other places along the shores (Bartholomew 2012, 186). Here Champ is used for tourism. A Burlington, Vermont, minor league baseball team has 'Champy', an almost Mutant Ninja Turtle lookalike water monster, as mascot (Bartholomew 2012, 119). Here, the monster is taken as a symbol of local identity and identification, even pride.

But the lake monster can carry even more abstract meanings. The 1980s have seen much discussion on the health of large bodies of water, environmental pollution, acid rain, and such. Champ was used as a means to express concerns about the environment, and, in this way, as a means to express a sense of belonging to the lake. Bartholomew (2012, 195) calls Champ 'an important

symbol for the environmental health of the lake'. Its use was ambivalent. On the one hand, monster researcher Joe Zarzynski called for a protection of the 'animal' and for means to keep the lake clean, on the other hand, a man dressed as Champ appeared on a 'heated public hearing by International Paper (IP) Company Mill in Ticonderoga' which was charged with polluting the lake, 'the implication being that the many Champ sightings were evidence that the lake was healthy' (Zarzynski 1984, 112; Bartholomew 2012, 195).

As a representation of the lake, Champ can be used freely to express whatever issues local residents may have.

Pend Oreille Paddler – from joke to faction

The monster of Idaho's Lake Pend Oreille started as a clear joke – an amusing drawing on maps of local guide books, just like the monstrous whales that were used on old maps to fill the void. In its first appearances on such tourist maps it is depicted either as a pink elephant with a fairy riding on it or a giant trout that awaits a willing fisherman.

While certain factors might have contributed to reported sightings, such as a US Navy Training Station at the lake, in the course of the years these rumours have assumed a life of their own and now, as at many other lakes, there are sightings of monstrous water creatures that are reported and that have been collected by a so-called 'Cryptozoology Club' of the North Idaho College. Their booklet on the investigation (McLeod 1987) reproduces several newspaper clippings, from which it is clear that people locally now associate their lake with the artificial legend of the 'mysterious and seldom seen "Pend Oreille Paddler," cousin of the Loch Ness monster' (McLeod 1987, 83). The animal is established well enough to be used in advertisements (McLeod 1987, 27), and it is regularly 'observed'. Although most newspaper reports are very much tongue in cheek, there is also evidently a slowly growing awareness of the 'monster' and a pride of possession, so it may have managed the process from invention to acceptance.

Local vs. international

Another interesting aspect is how a local phenomenon, which might later become an item of common identity, is first described in comparison to and connection with a better known phenomenon from a completely different location. To use a lake monster as a local symbol, for example, it first has to be assimilated to well-known models, and then isolated as a local concept. Therefore, we often learn about new lake monsters under headlines or appellations such as 'Nessie makes vacations in Greece', or of some lake as 'Greece's Loch Ness'. It has now become common that all lake monsters globally are described in reference to the Scottish blueprint. Thus:

- 'Lake Champlain: America's Loc Ness' [sic] (Mangiacopra 1978).
- 'Lake Iliamna in Alaska is North America's very own Loch Ness' (Wade 2011, 167).

This was different before 1933, which shows that a strange phenomenon has to earn its place in a community's heart and in global awareness. Also, foreign phenomena are perceived in a communal frame of reference, turning the international into something local. In 1933, when the Loch Ness monster was unknown, and local monsters well known, the situation was vice versa, see for example, a page-long report on the Loch Ness monster from the *New Zealand Evening Post*, 14 December 1933, which includes these lines under the heading 'Scottish Taniwha':

> But one thinks that if the Highlanders left anything out [regarding mythological creatures], the Maoris filled it very neatly with their taniwha. The taniwha has always seemed to be peculiarly Maori, and the twenty feet lizardlike creature in Loch Ness looks something like a plagiarism. But there is no copyright in mythology.

Nowadays, the taniwha might well be called New Zealand's Loch Ness monster.

'Disneyfication'

The concept of the Disneyfication to better understand a modern monster was introduced into the literature by University of Birmingham anthropologist Paul Lester. He described Disney's method of narrating wild life as

> sentimentalised and family-centered portraits of animals, endowed with innocent and simple human characters. Here nature could be interpreted in such a way as to represent the final taming and domestication of the frontier wilderness. It could be given a 'homely', 'lovable' quality denuded of violence and savagery. (Lester 1984, 15)

In this sense, Canada's Cadborosaurus was shortened to Caddy, and then press reports began to surface about his wife, Amy. Most lake monsters, as frightening as their myths may sound, are today given funny nick-names (modelled after Nessie – i.e. Issie, Bennie etc.). Also, hundreds of cuddly toys of Nessie, Ogopogo, and Champ testify to the extent Disneyfication has already taken place.

Ogopogo, the lake serpent of Lake Okanagon, allegedly overturned the canoes of Indians who always carried a sacrifice with them in case they met the creature. Now, Arlene Gaal, a local proponent of the monster, can name one of her many books on Ogopogo: *In Search of Ogopogo: Sacred Creature of the Okanagan Waters* (Gaal 2001). It is rather a sign of changing human attitudes than of a behavioural shift in the alleged creature itself – the water monster threatening the local inhabitants has been turned into a symbol of a peaceful environment. It is difficult to see how visitors could be attracted if it were otherwise. When we

recall how much of a danger Ogopogo was considered to be to early settlers and Indians, and now see tourists coming with the sole intention of seeing it (instead of trying to avoid such an experience at all costs), we find that the dangerous lake monster is long dead, and the Disney monster replaces it. This reflects the way we increasingly tend to regard nature today, as a healing antidote to everyday life, instead of something to be conquered.

This Disneyfication plays an important role when something that may have been perceived as dangerous is nowadays turned into something which can be easily used as a mascot, be friendly to kids and the environment, and can be manufactured as a soft toy. It appears that this Disneyfication is sometimes necessary to locally adopt a 'fortean' legend as regional mascot – cuddly rather than scary.

Monuments to local monsters

The Romans dedicated altars to their *genius loci*. We today build statues and fix plaques on sites of 'fortean' interest. They are used for several purposes: to foster local identification with the phenomenon, to appropriate it (in contrast to a neighbouring place which might not have such a monument and therefore 'own' it less), and to attract tourists – as in the example we've already noted of the board listing sightings of Champ erected, at Port Henry. But many communities express their own claimed anomalous phenomenon by a monument. To erect a monument manifests pride in a fact, and a willingness to associate a place and oneself with this fact. Regarded this way, a monument to a 'monster' makes such a local legend more highly visible and shows that it has been adopted by the community.

At Loch Ness, there is a statue of a plesiosaur, claimed to be a likeness of Nessie, at a pond behind the 'Official Loch Ness Monster Exhibition' at Drumnadrochit. In the 1980s, Drumnadrochit had several monster exhibitions, as well as Urquhart Castle nearby, making it the point to supposedly see the monster. The word 'official' also was somewhat of a hyperbole stressing the appropriation of the monster (Holder 2007, 81).

Many of the alleged homes of monsters have memorials depicting them. A modern, quite abstract monument to the monster of Lake Storsjö in Sweden may be found at Östersund (Storsjöodjuret, photo at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Storsj%C3%B6odjuret), while Maggie, the monster of Lago Maggiore in Italy, is celebrated by a 70-foot granite monster worm along the shore at Baveno (Magin 2006). Also in Italy, the creature of Lake Garda, Italy, a modern artwork, as large as a horse, stands at the southern end of the town of Garda's lake front, and depicts a black dragon-like creature with a horse's head and body, a serpent's or dinosaur's tail, three-fingered arms and feet, and mighty bat's wings. The monster catfish of the Zwischenahner Meer (Lake Zwischenahn), a 3.5m beast allegedly spotted in 1979, is commemorated by a large silvery monument on the market square of Bad Zwischenahn, the lake's largest town (*UFO-Strategien* 2000,

86–87). Issie, the monster of Lake Ikeda on Kyushu, Japan, is celebrated by several monuments, among them a gigantic dinosaur and a grey horse-sized white dragon creature with a duck's bill (Eberhart 2002, 251).

A monster expressing a locale may not necessarily be a lake creature. Although difficult to limit in range, land monsters may also be used as local markers, such as the life-sized carved image of Bigfoot stands at the roadside at Willow Creek in Humboldt County in north-western California (Bord and Bord 1982, 75). The completely facetious monster bird *Elwetritsche*, which is a kind of heraldic bird for the Palatinate in Germany, is honoured by many statues, fountains, and even a museum (Magin 2016, 90–99).

At most of these places, postcards are on sale, and tourist take photographs of themselves standing at the monuments. They obviously symbolise the area for locals and tourists alike.

Stamps with monster motifs

National pride and identity must not necessarily be expressed in a stationary monument. Sometimes, as a symbol of the national spirit, monsters are printed on postal stamps. These, in a way, are even more 'official' documents than a signpost at a roadside.

Bhutan takes its pride, among other things, from the 'fact' that it is home of the yeti. This hirsute monster has been the subject of Bhutan postal stamps issued in 1966, 1979, and 1996 and – somewhat obscurely – by the Maldives in 1992 (Tchernine 1970, 67; Shuker 2009). In October 1990, Canada issued a four-piece set of stamps showing Sasquatch, Kraken, Werewolf and Ogopogo respectively. This Ogopogo comes with a flowing mane the colours of the rainbow – Ogopogo Disneyfied once more (Swarek 1991).

Concluding remarks

As unlikely as it might seem, a 'monster' – which, after all, is generally regarded with ridicule – can form a focus around which a sense of common identity may build. However, a sighted monster does not automatically lead to this form of identification and local promotion.

Different factors, which may vary from site to site, are needed to establish such a commonly accepted link (for example, there are much more lakes where monsters are reported, but which are not generally perceived by the people as monster lakes), and then for it to survive. Certainly, a 'monster' is ideally suited to represent certain landscapes (often those perceived as a border between civilisation and wilderness), and especially so if it has been made consumer-friendly.

While a community might resist the identification for some time (as happened at Loch Ness), once the link is established and accepted, the local

phenomenon can be celebrated by erecting monuments, using it as mascot, or even as a brand that represents a place or region for marketing tourism. When a 'monster' is used as a symbolic expression of identity of a region, it can express pride in a sports team, and even be used to voice local concerns, such as environmental pollution. Like a heraldic animal, a 'monster' may finally even become a globally accepted symbol for a place or region.

Note

1. 'Forteana' and 'fortean' are terms coined after Charles Fort (1874–1932), the American chronicler of scientific anomalies. In a popular sense, fortean phenomena refer to all kinds of scientifically disputed happenings which are only known from anecdotal evidence, what the popular press calls UFOs, sea serpents, yeti, Bigfoot, or lake monsters.

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Notes on contributor

Ulrich Magin is a German writer on local history and unusual phenomena and human experience. He has written several books and papers on anomalous phenomena, mainly on alternative archaeology, monsters, and UFOs.

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